

# Asking For A FRIEND? Hard Questions About Faith

## (1) "How Do I Know I Can Trust the Bible?"

### HIGHLIGHT: 2 Timothy 3:1 - 4:5 NLT

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*Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.*

#### 2 TIMOTHY 3 (NLT)

##### vv.1-17

**1** You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. **2** For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. **3** They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. **4** They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. **5** They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!

**6** They are the kind who work their way into people's homes and win the confidence of vulnerable women who are burdened with the guilt of sin and controlled by various desires. **7** (Such women are forever following new teachings, but they are never able to understand the truth.) **8** These teachers oppose the truth just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses. They have depraved minds and a counterfeit faith. **9** But they won't get away with this for long. Someday everyone will recognize what fools they are, just as with Jannes and Jambres.

**10** But you, Timothy, certainly know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance. **11** You know how much persecution and suffering I have endured. You know all about how I was persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra—but the Lord rescued me from all of it. **12** Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. **13** But evil people and impostors will flourish. They will deceive others and will themselves be deceived.

**14** But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. **15** You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus.

**16** All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. **17** God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

## 2 TIMOTHY 4 (NLT)

### vv.1-5

**1** I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: **2** Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.

**3** For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. **4** They will reject the truth and chase after myths.

**5** But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.

## EXPLAIN

*The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone's understanding of the Word.*

Dag Hammarskjöld ("the greatest statesman of our century" according to President John F. Kennedy), in mid-20th century lamented the loss of truth as a cornerstone of history. Watching the reports of current events at the time, he said that he had "witnessed over the last weeks how historical truth is established; once an allegation has been repeated a few times, it is an established fact, even if no evidence has been brought out in order to support it." Opposition to truth is not a new phenomena. It is as old as humanity. "God said [to Eve], 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.' 'You won't die,' the serpent replied to [Eve]. 'God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God...' The woman was convinced...So she took some of the fruit and ate it...At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame" (Genesis 3:3-7). The Devil, the father of lies (see John 8:42-44), chalked up his first victory. The Apostle Paul deals with the rejection of truth in his second letter to Timothy.

### 2 Timothy 3

**vv.1-5** Paul summarizes **the last days as very difficult times**. Whether Paul felt that he was in the last days, or felt that those days were in the future, we know that we are by simply looking at his description (see vv.1-4). The natural question is "Why can't we fix this mess?" U Thant (2nd Secretary General of the United Nations) was baffled by our smash-and-grab world: "What element is lacking so that with all our skill and all our knowledge we still find ourselves in the dark valley of discord and enmity" (from "The Forces We Face", sermon preached by Ray Stedman, October 31, 1965). We may have all the tools and expertise that could be desired, but **reject[ing] the power that can make [us] godly** imprisons us in the "storms and turmoils of our present difficulties" (U Thant). Embracing truth is the only way out of the jungle of "evil desires that war inside us (see James 4:1).

**vv.6-9** The answer to *why can't we fix this mess?* is that we "get on the wrong plane." If I want a nice winter vacation at Disney World I better not get on the plane to Anchorage, Alaska. That will be a great disappointment! To recognize that we are broken people is a great first step. But we get on the wrong

plane to get fixed. We **follow new teachings** but we don't get on the **truth** plane. So we never shed **our guilt of sin** and slavery to our **various desires**. The cycle keeps repeating itself not because truth is not available, but because **teachers that oppose the truth** are in great supply.

**vv.10-13** People may tell a lie, they may believe a lie, but most of them will not die for a lie—if they know it's a lie. Paul encourages Timothy to investigate people's lives. Timothy, **you know what I teach and how I live. You know my faith, patience, love and endurance**. Paul's purpose in life kept him strong through persecution—even to the point of dying (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-29). Timothy, look at them. Yes, they draw great crowds by **deceiving others**—teaching a religion that costs nothing. "Timothy, will they die for the falsehoods they teach?" History is a knowledge of the past based on testimony. The apostles' testimony can be trusted because they died martyrs' deaths based on two truths: the deity of Jesus and His resurrection. These men were eye witnesses. If the resurrection had not happened, they would have known it. If they died for it, they would have died knowing it was a lie. Yet they staked their lives on it (no pun intended). They knew it was a reality. "The apostles went through the test of death to substantiate the veracity of what they were proclaiming. I believe I can trust their testimony more than that of most people I meet today" (Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter*, p.103). He hit many of us when he said, "I grieve to find so many who lack enough conviction in their lives even to walk across the street for what they believe, much less to die for it." The apostles' testimonies were not webs of deceit (see 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1-3; Luke 1:1-3; Acts 1:1-3). All it would take to disprove the Bible is for one witness to step forward and say, *I have seen His body*.

**vv.14-15** These verses emphasize that *the evidence of truth is substantiated by the lives of those who teach it*. Have your teachers' lives been improved by what they teach? Are they "counterfeits" (see v.8)?

**vv.16-17** **Scripture** changes lives because it **is inspired by God**. It is a Holy Bible—hagios (different, set apart for a special purpose) biblos (book). And because it is inspired by *God*—God-breathed—it has His life in it. His life changes us because He is life. Jesus talked to two men on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. Not recognizing Jesus, they expressed their dashed hopes because of His crucifixion. Jesus took them through the Scriptures—explaining how they predicted all that had happened. Their response: "Didn't our hearts burn within us as He talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" (see Luke 24:19-32.) That is the power of the inspired Scripture; Scripture that has the breath of God in it breathes life into us. Because the Bible is God-breathed, it has a life that cannot die. "When we bear in mind the fact that the Bible has been the special object of never ending persecution the wonder of the Bible's survival is changed into a *miracle*....For 2,000 years man's hatred of the Bible has been persistent, determined, relentless and murderous...The very fact that the Bible has been so singled out for such persecution causes us to wonder at such a unique phenomenon" (Arthur W. Pink, quoted by Raymond F. Surburg in *How Dependable is the Bible?* pp. 186 and 187).

**2 Timothy 4:1-5** Even though the **time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching, but chase after myths and look for teachers who will tell them what their itching ears want to hear**, Paul urges Timothy to **preach the word of God; patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage [his] people with good teaching** without being **afraid of suffering for the Lord**. Why such emphasis on preaching *the Word of God*? Jesus' response to Satan's temptation to turn the stones to bread give us the answer: "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:1-4; see Deuteronomy 8:1-5). Jeremiah reminds us that God's Word is a fire that burns straw, a hammer that crushes the false philosophies of man (23:25-29). "The noted infidel

Voltaire, who died in 1778, predicted that within a hundred years of his death Christianity would be extinct and the Bible unread. How successful Voltaire was in making the Bible obsolete may be seen from the fact that only twenty-five years after his death, the British and Foreign Bible Society was organized and the very presses that had published Voltaire's writings were used to publish Bibles" (Surburg, *How Dependable is the Bible?*, p. 187).

As you consider the reliability of the Bible strive to enter with an open mind, and to be as fair in your tests for the Bible as you would with all other literature of antiquity. Most manuscript copies of the New Testament are dated no later than A.D. 80 (William F. Albright, quoted in *More than a Carpenter*, p. 65). There are more than 20,000 New Testament manuscripts in existence as of 2009 (McDowell, *More than a Carpenter*, p. 74). "No classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides [only 8 manuscripts of the history of Thucydides is available to us] is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts of their works which are of use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals" (F. F. Bruce, quoted in *More than a Carpenter*, p. 71). Why would we be so quick to discount the 20,000 NT manuscripts that were written within one generation of the originals?

And consider that the bold statements of the NT writers (*Jesus is God; He was raised from the dead and never died again*) were circulated in the lifetimes of people who could confirm or deny the accuracy of the accounts. The writers even challenged the critics to prove them wrong (Acts 2:22; 26:24-26). One had better be careful when he asserts *you know this also*. The details better be correct or he will "eat crow". Will Durant, trained in the discipline of historical investigation, writes in *Caesar and Christ*, "After two centuries of Higher Criticism the outlines of the life, character, and teachings of Christ remain reasonably clear and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man" (quoted in *More than a Carpenter*, p. 84).

All the navies, armies, and philosophies of mankind have never succeeded in destroying the Bible. To paraphrase John Clifford's verse, *God's Word is the anvil on which many a hammer has been worn out*.

## APPLY

*Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.*

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. What does it mean that the Scriptures are "inspired by God" (or "breathed out by God")?
3. Why do you think Paul says "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"? How might that apply to our current context (in our town, in the US and in the world)?
4. Paul reminds Timothy, "you know what I teach, and how I live" (3:10). How can our lives help someone else believe the Scriptures?
5. What role does Scripture have in our mission to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)?

## RESPOND

*The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.*

1. Persecution can either grow our faith (James 1:2-4) or reveal that our faith was shallow and had no real roots (Matthew 13:20-21). Paul tells Timothy that in the last days (meaning all of the days since Christ poured out His Spirit—Acts 2:17, Hebrews 1:2) there will be very difficult times (2 Timothy 3:1), but he also charges Timothy to always be ready to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-2). In your life, in what way(s) are you tempted to abandon the faith when times are difficult? Have you ever compromised on the truth of the word for fear of persecution?
2. Paul makes clear to Timothy God's truth, which can be found in Scripture, is the foundation of our faith in God. (1 Timothy 3:14-17) God uses it to teach us and prepare us to live life according to His will, not our own, and to share the good news of his love and plan for us. How are you studying God's truth? What are ways you can dive into his truth this week? (Be specific. Not just "read the Bible.") Consider studying something specific; Jesus in John, the Gospel in Ephesians, Romans, or Colossians, the History of the early Church in Acts, the beginning in Genesis or the end in Revelation. Start with prayer. Ask God to reveal His truth to you as you read, journal, reflect, and apply his truth in your life.

The new [d]Group reading plan begins this Sunday, August 9. Pick one up in the Resource Center, where you can purchase a [d]Group journal, or download it at <https://sohillsc.com/dgroups>. It is also available with a free digital journal in the Southern Hills app. If you aren't sure who to invite to [d]group, consider splitting up your life group (men together, women together) and beginning there!